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ABSTRACT

While audience analysis is an important concept to be taught in any beginning speech class, seldom are students urged to view their classmates as an authentic audience and to consider their needs and interests in speech planning. The Dyadic Interview Activity is one that can help students apply the principles of audience analysis in planning their classroom speeches. The Dyadic Interview Activity is used during the first or second class meeting of the semester. This getting acquainted activity involves the students in pairing-up and gathering information about one another. Additional information such as hobbies, goals, interests, group memberships, and concerns about current events is generated in the interviews. The structure of the introduction speech is then discussed, and students outline a short speech about their partners. Students then stand before the class and introduce their partners via their speech. The remaining students take notes on the characteristics of each of the students as they are introduced, and the resulting list becomes the basis for viewing the class as an authentic audience. As a written follow-up assignment, students are asked to write down five topics that the class would be interested in based on the data from the introductions. (A sample written assignment resulting from the dyadic activity is appended). (HTH)

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Viewing the Speech Class as an Authentic Audience: An Activity and Assignment for Beginning Students

by

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Abstract

This paper outlines an activity and assignment to assist students in choosing realistic speech topics. Beginning speech students are not always comfortable with the process of choosing a topic. This occurs primarily because the students may not be familiar with their classmates, and thus, their interest. Through the activity and assignment suggested, students should: (1) become better acquainted with their classmates, and (2) consequently gain an insight to topics that may be of interest to the class. The appendix contains a student's paper that resulted from the written assignment.

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Viewing the Speech Class as an Authentic Audience: An Activity and Assignment for Beginning Students

Deciding what topic to speak on provides a real dilemma for beginning speech students. The question, "What topic should I speak on?" is one that stems from the fact that many students are not familiar with their classmates. While audience analysis is an important concept to be taught in any beginning speech class, seldom are the students urged to view their classmates as an authentic audience, and to consider their needs and interest in speech planning. As Lucas (1983) contends,

> There is a tendency--among students and teachers alike--to view the classroom as an artificial speaking situation. . . The best classroom speeches are those that take the classroom audience as seriously as a lawyer, a politician, a minister, or an advertiser takes an audience. (p.66)

Beginning speech students should not only learn the principles of audience analysis, but they should be applying the principles in planning for their classroom speeches (Holloway, 1984). Outlined in this paper is an activity and assignment that I have used to help students in realizing the importance of audience analysis in planning their classroom speeches. In addition, the activity to be cited also serves as a good icebreaker and first speaking experience for the students.

Activity

1. The Dyadic Interview Activity is used on the first or second class meeting of the semester. This popular getting-acquainted activity involves the students in pairing up and gathering information about one another. The information is more than name, rank, and serial number in nature. Additional information such as hobbies, goals, interests, group memberships, and concerns about current events is also generated in the interviews, Still further, I ask them to

find out something unique about their partners. This first stage serves an icebreaking function for the initial class meeting(s).

2. After the information-gathering stage is complete, I briefly discuss the structure of a speech to introduce, and have the students outline a short speech about their partners, encouraging them to use any unique information gathered as an attention-getting device. When all students have outlined a brief speech (1-2 minutes in length), they proceed to stand before the class and introduce their partners via the speech. This second part of the activity serves as a first speaking experience to begin acclimating the students to speaking before a group.
3. As a student is being introduced by his/her partner, the remainder of the class should be taking notes on who the student is. Specifically, I tell them to note the student's marital status, hobbies, interests, group memberships, concerns about current events, etc. After all of the students have been introduced by their partners, the class should have compiled a list of various characteristics that represent who their classmates are. This list is the basis for coming to view the class as an authentic audience.

Written Assignment

During the unit on audience analysis the students do an assignment based on the list of their classmates' marital status, hobbies, interests, group memberships, concerns about current events, etc. Using the list, the students are asked to write down five topics that the class would be interested in based on inferences drawn from the data (Nelson and Pearson, 1984). For example, a student may recognize that the class

may be interested in a speech on note-taking skills since a majority of them are first semester freshmen. Still another may infer that parental issues may be of interest if the class consist of many parents. Ultimately, the student should produce five topics that the data suggest would be of interest to the class, and explain why s/he believes the topics would be of interest. The appendix contains a student's paper that resulted from this assignment.

Essentially, the goal of the assignment is to have students consider the basic principles of audience analysis when planning a speech (i.e., demographics, the audience's needs and interest, the need to draw inferences from data, etc.). The more complex assessments of attitudes, amount of knowledge, and process analysis among others are not considered with this activity and assignment. Yet, the basic assessments that precede all others are considered. Furthermore, a real concern is attended to with the activity and assignment; that being the concern of not knowing what will be of interest to the audience (class). Through further consultation with the instructor or the activity suggested by Rossiter (1973), the beginning speech student reduces to some degree the uncertainty associated with topic selection. In the process, the class will be viewed as an authentic audience, no longer having to be a captive audience in an "artificial context."

References

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Appendix

The following written assignment was turned in by Kevin Crouch--a speech student during the Spring 1985 semester at ENMU-Clovis. I consider Kevin's paper to be a good model of the written assignment discussed earlier. The paper does contain some grammatical errors, but overall it is exemplary.

Audience Analysis Paper
by Kevin Crouch

The topics that come to mind are many. One area that could be covered in a speech that would relate to this audience is, "How to manage your time more effectively to help you maintain a family and attend college." This is an area that could be of interest to the class. Trying to juggle time so that all of the necessary things in life are completed is quite complicated. The class as a group do have families and any knowledge on how to make more time for these activities could be of benefit to them. This topic could have real value to this audience.

Another area that would relate to this audience is, "Children in the home." The data that we collected show that the class contains many children still living in the home. This area has many possibilities and the depth of coverage could vary greatly.

The area of sports was another common subject that showed up in the data. This area of interest could be caused by the trend in the nation's concern of health and fitness. This topic is very broad and much thought would need to be given to the exact message to be imparted by the speech. Health and the whole family could be considered.

The world's state of war is a topic of concern to many. This topic is ever present in the news and on our minds. The class showed much concern

about this issue. To prepare a speech on this topic would be difficult and a further evaluation of the audience's needs would be necessary to present a more concise topic. However, this is a major concern for most of the class and the possibilities need to be explored.

A speech concerned with an aspect of military life is an area that could be of value to this audience. The majority of the students are attached to the military directly or by marriage. This area would take a lot of research for me to cover I don't know much about its function. This would be of interest to me because of the lack of knowledge in this area. It would introduce me to a new subject and perhaps at the same time give new a different perspective to the audience because of a third party's look at their life.